WHAT CHRISTIANS BELIEVE

The Core Truths of the Faith in Plain Words



God, the Bible, Jesus, the Spirit,
salvation, the church and the things to come

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Enterprises

What Christians Believe

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Andrew Dominguez

What Christians Believe: The Core Truths of the Faith in Plain Words

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A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Before You Begin

Sanctify them in Your truth; Your word is truth.

John 17:17 (SLB)

What do Christians actually believe? Ask ten people on the street and you may get ten answers. Some will say Christians believe you should be a good person. Some will say Christians think they are better than everyone else. Some will name a list of rules. Even many people in church would have a hard time explaining the basics of their faith if a neighbor asked them.

I have believed in God as long as I can remember, yet I drifted from Him more than once. Leading Bible studies, serving as a lay pastor and preaching, I noticed how often people stumble over big church words. I translated the Steadfast Literal Bible because I wanted Scripture clear and accurate in plain English. I wrote this book for readers who want to know what the Bible teaches without jargon.

That is why I wrote this book. It lays out the core truths of the Christian faith, one at a time, in plain words, with the Bible open.

Who This Book Is For

This book is for a new believer who wants to understand what they now believe. It's for a longtime Christian who wants a refresher, or who wants to be ready to explain the faith to someone else. It's for a parent who wants to teach their kids. And it's for anyone who is curious and wants a straight answer.

How It Works

There are eighteen short chapters in five parts. Part One is about God and His Word. Part Two is about Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Part Three is about people, sin and salvation. Part Four is about the church and the Christian life. Part Five is about the things to come.

Each chapter does three things. It states the belief simply. It shows where the Bible teaches it. And it explains why it matters for your life. Each chapter ends with a short Going Deeper note that points you to a fuller book on that subject, and with study questions for personal reading or a group.

What I Mean by "Christians"

In this book, when I say what Christians believe, I mean the faith taught in the Bible and confessed by believers through the centuries, the truths summed up in the earliest creeds of the church. On those core truths, faithful Christians in many different churches stand together. On some other questions, like the exact order of end-time events or how often to take communion, faithful believers differ. When I come to one of those, I tell you what I believe the Bible teaches, and I say plainly that other believers see it differently.

A Few Notes

Scripture quotations come from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). Words set in bold italics inside a quotation are words added in English to make the sentence read clearly. I capitalize pronouns that refer to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Inside Scripture quotations, and inside the old creed at the back, I leave the capitals as they are printed.

Part One: God and His Word

Chapter 1: There Is a God

> *The heavens are recounting the glory of God, and the expanse is declaring the work of His hands.*
>
> Psalm 19:1 (SLB)

Christians believe there is one true God. He is not a force, an idea, or a feeling. He is a living, personal Being who made everything, who knows everything, who is present everywhere, and who rules over all. He has no beginning and no end.

> *Before **the** mountains were born, and You brought forth the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You **are** God.* (Psalm 90:2)

How Do We Know?

The Bible doesn't spend much time arguing that God exists. It starts with "In the beginning God." But it does tell us that God has made Himself known in two main ways.

First, through what He made. Paul says God's eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen in creation, so that people are without excuse.

> *For His invisible **things**, from **the** creation of **the** world, being understood by the things made, are clearly seen, both His eternal power and divinity, for them to be without excuse*
> (Romans 1:20)

Think about it. Everything that begins to exist has a cause. The universe had a beginning. So something outside the universe caused it. The order of the universe, the fine balance of its laws, the information packed into every living cell, all point to a Mind behind it. And inside every person there is a sense of right and wrong, and a longing for something more than this world can give. Those are fingerprints of the God who made us.

Second, and more clearly, God has spoken. He spoke through the prophets and apostles in the Bible, and most of all He came in person in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2). Creation tells us there is a God. The Bible and Jesus tell us who He is.

What God Is Like

The Bible tells us God is holy, completely pure and set apart from all evil. The angels around His throne cry "Holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6:3). He is just, always doing what is right. He is all-powerful; nothing is too hard for Him. He knows all things, even the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:9-10). He is everywhere present; you can't go anywhere He isn't (Psalm 139). He never changes.

And the Bible tells us God is love (1 John 4:8). His love isn't soft or blind. It's holy love. It's the love of a Father who gave His own Son for people who had rebelled against Him.

When I was a boy in Victorville, I mowed the lawn for Pastor Jimmy Carter, who lived down our street. He took me to church and led me to Christ. Looking back over about forty years of work and raising a family, God's faithfulness stands out most. Even when I drifted, He never left me.

Why It Matters

If there is a God who made you, then you belong to Him. Your life has a purpose because He gave it one. You are not an accident. And you will one day stand before Him. That is the most important fact in the world. Everything else in this book builds on it.

> *And without faith **it is** impossible to please **Him**; for the one who draws near to God must believe that He is, and **that** He becomes a rewarder to those who earnestly seek Him.*
> (Hebrews 11:6)

Going Deeper

My mini book Is There Really a God looks honestly at the evidence for God. Dug Up and Written Down shows how history and archaeology confirm the Bible's record.

Study Questions

1. Read Psalm 19:1 and Romans 1:20. What does creation tell us about God?
2. Which of God's qualities in this chapter means the most to you right now? Why?
3. Read Hebrews 11:6. What two things must a person believe to come to God?

Chapter 2: The Bible Is God's Word

> *The heaven and the earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.*
>
> Matthew 24:35 (SLB)

Christians believe the Bible is the Word of God. It was written by more than forty human authors over about fifteen hundred years, in three languages, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, on three continents. But behind all of those human writers stands one Author, God Himself.

> *Every Scripture **is** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which **is** in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.* (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The phrase "God-breathed" means the Scriptures came out of the mouth of God. The writers weren't taking dictation like machines. Each one wrote in his own style and from his own life. But the Holy Spirit carried them along so that what they wrote was exactly what God wanted written.

> *knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from private interpretation; for prophecy was never borne by **the** will of man, but being borne by **the** Holy Spirit, holy men of God spoke.* (2 Peter 1:20-21)

What Follows from That

Because the Bible is God's Word, it is true in everything it teaches. God can't lie, so His Word doesn't lie. It's our final authority for what to believe and how to live. Church traditions, preachers, feelings, dreams and books like this one must all be tested by the Bible. If they disagree with it, the Bible wins.

It is also enough. It gives us everything we need to know God, be saved, and live a godly life. Paul says it makes the man of God "complete, fully equipped for every good work."

Can We Trust It?

People sometimes ask whether the Bible we have today is what was first written. The evidence is strong. We have more than five thousand Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, some from within a few generations of the apostles, far more than for any other ancient book. The Dead Sea Scrolls, found in 1947, include copies of Old Testament books more than a thousand years older than any copies known before, and they match the later copies remarkably well. Archaeology keeps confirming people, places and events the Bible names. And hundreds of prophecies written centuries ahead were fulfilled in detail.

Most of all, Jesus trusted the Scriptures. He quoted them as the word of God, said they could not be broken (John 10:35), and said not one stroke would pass away. If we trust Jesus, we can trust the Book He trusted.

Which Books?

Christians recognize sixty-six books: thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New. Some churches add other books, called the Apocrypha, which come from the years between the Testaments. They can be useful history, but the Jews did not count them as Scripture, and neither do most Protestant churches.

Going Deeper

Which Bible, Which Books? explains how we got the Bible and why these sixty-six books. Dug Up and Written Down covers the evidence. Foretold traces the prophecies of Jesus. My mini book Trusting the Word of God is a short start.

Study Questions

1. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What does it mean that Scripture is “God-breathed”?
2. Why must the Bible be our final authority over tradition and feelings?
3. Which piece of evidence for the Bible’s reliability is most helpful to you?

Chapter 3: One God in Three Persons

> *Therefore, having gone, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*
>
> Matthew 28:19 (SLB)

Christians believe there is only one God. And we believe that this one God exists eternally as three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each Person is fully God. Yet there are not three Gods, but one. This is called the Trinity.

That word isn't in the Bible, but the teaching is. Here is a simple way to say it: God is one What and three Whos. One divine nature, one Being. Three Persons who know and love one another.

Three Truths the Bible Teaches

There is one God. Israel's great confession is, "Hear, Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Bible never budges from this. Isaiah 45 says again and again that there is no other God.

The Father, the Son and the Spirit are each God. The Father is called God throughout the Bible. The Son is called God: "the Word was God" (John 1:1), and "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Deity bodily" (Colossians 2:9). The Holy Spirit is called God: when Ananias lied to the Spirit, Peter said, "You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3-4).

The three are distinct Persons. At Jesus' baptism the Son was in the water, the Spirit came down like a dove, and the Father spoke from heaven (Matthew 3:16-17). Jesus prayed to the Father, and promised the Father would send "another Helper," the Spirit (John 14:16). They are not one Person wearing three masks.

Put those three truths together and you have the Trinity. Jesus put the three names under one name when He sent His disciples to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Why Every Picture Breaks

People try to explain the Trinity with pictures: water as ice, liquid and steam; an egg with shell, white and yolk; a man who is a father, son and husband. Every one of them breaks somewhere. Water can't be all three forms at once in the same way. An egg's parts are each only part of the egg. A man in three roles is still one person. The truth is, nothing in creation is quite like the Creator. The Trinity is above our understanding, but it isn't against reason. It's simply what God has told us about Himself.

Why It Matters

The Trinity isn't a puzzle for scholars. It's the heart of the gospel. The Father sent the Son. The Son died for us. The Spirit brings us to new life. Salvation is the work of the whole Trinity. And because God has

always been a community of love, Father, Son and Spirit, love didn't begin when God made us. God is love from all eternity, and He invites us into that love.

> *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit* ***be*** *with you all. Amen.* (2 Corinthians 13:14)

Going Deeper

One God, Three Persons explains the Trinity simply and compares it with other views of God, like Oneness teaching, Jehovah's Witness teaching, and the teaching of the Latter-day Saints.

Study Questions

1. What three truths does the Bible teach that together make up the Trinity?
2. Why do all our pictures of the Trinity fall short?
3. How does the work of the Father, Son and Spirit show up in your salvation?

Chapter 4: God the Creator

> *In **the** beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*
>
> Genesis 1:1 (SLB)

Christians believe God created everything that exists, the heavens and the earth, the visible and the invisible, out of nothing. Before creation there was only God. He didn't need the world. He made it freely, by His word, for His glory.

> *because in Him all things were created, the **things** in the heavens and the **things** on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.* (Colossians 1:16-17)

Notice in this passage that the Son was active in creation. All things were created through Him and for Him, and in Him all things hold together. The whole Trinity was at work. The Father spoke, the Son was the Word through whom all things came to be (John 1:3), and the Spirit was hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:2).

I spend my working days keeping complex work on track, and it is easy to think everything depends on my planning. I learned the hard way that I cannot hold my own life together on willpower. Knowing that God created all things and holds them together takes the weight off my shoulders.

A Good World

Six times in Genesis 1 God looked at what He had made and saw that it was good. After He made man and woman, He saw that it was "very good." The world was not made evil. It was made good, and it's still beautiful, even though it has been broken by sin. That's why Christians can enjoy creation, care for it, study it, and thank God for it.

Made in God's Image

The crown of creation was mankind.

> *And God created mankind in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* (Genesis 1:27)

Adam and Eve were real people, the first man and woman, and every human being comes from them. Being made in God's image means we are like Him in ways the animals are not: we can think, choose, create, love, tell right from wrong, and know God. That is why every human life has worth, from the womb to old age, whatever a person's race, ability or status. David said, "I am distinguished; wonderful are Your works" (Psalm 139:14).

Christians agree that God created, that Adam and Eve were real, and that the Genesis account is true history. Christians do differ on the age of the earth and how to read the days of Genesis 1. I won't settle that question in a short book like this. What matters most is that God made it all, and He made you.

God Still Holds It Together

God didn't wind up the world like a clock and walk away. He is still involved. He holds all things together. He feeds the birds and clothes the flowers. He rules over the nations. This care of God over His creation is called providence. It means nothing in your life happens outside of His sight or His control.

Going Deeper

My Genesis Bible Study walks through the creation account verse by verse. The Whole Story traces God's plan from creation to new creation.

Study Questions

1. Read Colossians 1:16-17. What role does the Son have in creation?
2. What does it mean to be made in God's image, and why does it give every person worth?
3. How does knowing God holds all things together help you in a hard time?

Part Two: Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

Chapter 5: Jesus Is God and Man

> *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten from **the** Father, full of grace and truth.*
>
> John 1:14 (SLB)

At the center of the Christian faith is a Person, Jesus Christ. Christians believe Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, who became a man. He is fully God and fully man, one Person forever.

Fully God

Jesus didn't begin at Bethlehem. He existed before the world was made.

> *In **the** beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in **the** beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and without Him not even one **thing** came into being that has come into being.* (John 1:1-3)

Jesus said, "Before Abraham came into being, I am" (John 8:58), using the very name God gave Himself at the burning bush. The Jews understood, and picked up stones to kill Him for blasphemy. He forgave sins, which only God can do (Mark 2:5-7). He accepted worship (John 20:28). Thomas called Him "My Lord and my God." The New Testament calls Him "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Fully Man

Jesus was also truly human. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary and born as a baby. He grew up, got hungry, got tired, wept at a friend's grave, and felt deep sorrow in Gethsemane. He was tempted in every way we are, yet He never sinned.

> *For we do not have a high priest who is not able to sympathize with our weaknesses, but **one** who has been tempted in all things according to likeness, without sin.* (Hebrews 4:15)

Becoming man didn't mean Jesus stopped being God. Paul says He "emptied Himself" by taking the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). He added a human nature. He didn't subtract His divine one. This is called the incarnation, God "in flesh."

> *For let this be thought in you which **was** also in Christ Jesus, who, existing in **the** form of God, did not consider being equal with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, having taken **the** form of a slave, having come to be in **the** likeness of men; and having been found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, having become obedient as far as death, even death of a cross.* (Philippians 2:5-8)

Why It Matters

Jesus had to be man to take our place. A human had sinned, so a human had to pay. He had to be God for His sacrifice to be enough for all who believe, and to defeat death. Only someone who is both could bring

God and people together. That's why Paul calls Him the one mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5).

It also means God knows what it's like to be us. When you pray, you pray to Someone who has been hungry, tired, betrayed and grieving. He understands.

Going Deeper

My mini book Who Jesus Really Is is a short start. My John Bible Study walks through the Gospel written so that you may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Foretold shows how the prophets described Him centuries ahead.

Study Questions

1. Read John 1:1-3 and 1:14. What do these verses teach about who Jesus is?
2. What evidence in the Gospels shows that Jesus is fully God? Fully man?
3. Why did our Savior need to be both God and man?

Chapter 6: The Cross

> *And He **was** pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the chastening of our peace **was** on Him, and by His wound **there** was healing for us.*
>
> Isaiah 53:5 (SLB)

Christians believe Jesus died on a Roman cross outside Jerusalem as a real event in history, under the governor Pontius Pilate, around A.D. 30 or 33. And we believe His death was not a tragic accident or the end of a good man's career. It was God's plan to save sinners.

He Died in Our Place

Seven hundred years before the cross, Isaiah wrote this.

> *And He **was** pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the chastening of our peace **was** on Him, and by His wound **there** was healing for us. All of us like the sheep have gone astray; each to his own way we have turned; and the LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us.* (Isaiah 53:5-6)

That is the heart of the cross. We have all gone astray. Our sin deserves God's judgment. But God laid our sin on Jesus. He took the punishment we deserved, so that we could be forgiven. This is called substitution. Jesus died as our substitute.

> *Because Christ also suffered once for sins, **the** righteous for **the** unrighteous, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death indeed in **the** flesh, but having been made alive in the spirit* (1 Peter 3:18)

What the Cross Accomplished

The Bible uses several pictures to show what Jesus did on the cross.

- **A sacrifice.** Like the Passover lamb and the sacrifices of the Old Testament, Jesus' blood was shed so that sins could be forgiven. John the Baptist called Him "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29).
- **Satisfying God's justice.** God is just and can't ignore sin. At the cross, His justice was satisfied and His love was shown at the same time (Romans 3:25-26).
- **Redemption.** To redeem means to buy back. Jesus paid the price to free us from slavery to sin (Mark 10:45).
- **Reconciliation.** We were God's enemies. The cross makes peace between God and us (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).
- **Victory.** At the cross Jesus disarmed the powers of evil and triumphed over them (Colossians 2:15).

It Has Been Finished

As He died, Jesus said, "It has been finished" (John 19:30). The debt was paid in full. Nothing needs to be added. We can't add our good works, our religion, or our suffering to what Jesus did. We can only receive it.

And notice it was love that sent Him there. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Going Deeper

My mini book The Cross and the Empty Tomb walks through Jesus’ last week. The Lord’s Table explains how communion remembers His death. The Road Home lays out what the cross means for your salvation.

Study Questions

1. Read Isaiah 53:5-6. What does it mean that Jesus died as our substitute?
2. Which picture of the cross means the most to you, and why?
3. Why can nothing be added to what Jesus did on the cross?

Chapter 7: He Is Risen

> *For I delivered to you among **the** first **things** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*
>
> 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (SLB)

Christians believe that on the third day after His death, Jesus rose bodily from the grave. Not as a ghost, not as a memory, not as a story that grew in the telling. The same body that was nailed to the cross walked out of the tomb, changed and glorified, never to die again.

I was baptized on October 19, 1995. I have stood beside families at funerals, and I have walked through seasons when my own bad choices threatened everything I cared about. Without the empty tomb, our mistakes have the final word. Because Jesus rose, death is not the end for anyone who trusts Him.

Everything Rests on It

Paul says plainly that the whole faith stands or falls on this one event.

> *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith **is** futile; you are still in your sins.*
> (1 Corinthians 15:17)

If Jesus stayed dead, Christianity is a lie and we should stop going to church. But if He rose, then everything He said is true, His death really paid for sin, and death has been beaten.

The Evidence

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians around A.D. 55, and in chapter 15 he passed on a summary of the faith that he had received earlier, likely within a few years of the cross.

> *For I delivered to you among **the** first **things** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some also have fallen asleep. After that He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. And last of all, as to the untimely birth, He appeared also to me.* (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Notice what Paul says about the five hundred: most of them are still alive. In other words, go and ask them. Add to that the empty tomb, which even Jesus' enemies didn't deny; they only claimed the disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:11-15). Add the change in the disciples, who went from hiding behind locked doors to preaching boldly in the same city where Jesus was crucified, and dying for it. Add James, Jesus' brother, who didn't believe in Him during His ministry but became a leader of the church after Jesus appeared to him. Add Paul himself, a persecutor of Christians turned apostle. No other explanation fits all the facts as well as the one the disciples gave: He is risen.

What the Resurrection Means

- **Jesus is who He said He is.** Paul says He was declared the Son of God with power by His resurrection (Romans 1:4).
- **Our sins are truly forgiven.** The Father accepted the payment.
- **Death is defeated.** Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).
- **We will rise too.** His resurrection is the firstfruits, the first of the harvest, and all who belong to Him will be raised with bodies like His (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

He Ascended and Reigns

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus was taken up into heaven before His disciples' eyes (Acts 1:9-11). He sits at the right hand of the Father, ruling over all and praying for His people (Romans 8:34). And the angels promised He would come back the same way He went.

Going Deeper

Dug Up and Written Down covers the evidence for the Gospels as eyewitness accounts. My mini book The Cross and the Empty Tomb walks through Easter week.

Study Questions

1. Read 1 Corinthians 15:17. Why is the resurrection so central to the faith?
2. Which piece of evidence for the resurrection do you find most convincing?
3. How does Jesus' resurrection give you hope about your own death?

Chapter 8: The Holy Spirit

> *And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may remain with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world is not able to receive, because it does not see Him nor know Him; but you know Him, because He remains with you and will be in you.*
>
> John 14:16-17 (SLB)

Christians believe the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity. He is not a force or an energy. He is a Person: He teaches, guides, speaks, can be grieved and can be lied to. And He is God, equal with the Father and the Son.

What the Spirit Does

In the Old Testament, the Spirit came upon certain people for certain tasks: judges, kings, prophets and craftsmen. Jesus promised that after He went back to the Father, He would send the Spirit to live in all His people. On the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection, that promise was kept (Acts 2).

Here is some of what the Spirit does.

- **He convicts.** He shows the world its sin and its need for Christ (John 16:8).
- **He gives new life.** Jesus said a person must be born of the Spirit (John 3:5-8).
- **He lives in every believer.** "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this one is not His" (Romans 8:9). Every Christian has the Spirit.
- **He seals us.** He is God's guarantee that we belong to Him (Ephesians 1:13-14).
- **He teaches and guides.** He guided the apostles into all truth as they wrote the New Testament, and He helps us understand it.
- **He empowers.** He gives power to be Jesus' witnesses (Acts 1:8) and to say no to sin (Galatians 5:16).
- **He produces fruit.** Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).
- **He gives gifts.** "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Spiritual Gifts

Every believer has at least one spiritual gift, an ability the Spirit gives to serve the church. The Bible lists gifts like teaching, serving, giving, leading, mercy, encouragement, faith, wisdom and more (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4). Christians differ about whether some of the more dramatic gifts, like tongues, prophecy and healing, continue today the way they did in the apostles' time. Faithful believers hold both views. What all agree on is this: the Spirit gives gifts to build up the church, never to show off, and every gift must be used in love (1 Corinthians 13).

Walking by the Spirit

The Christian life is not trying harder in our own strength. It is depending on the Spirit day by day. Pray for His help. Read the Word He inspired. Obey His promptings. Don't grieve Him with sin (Ephesians 4:30). As you do, He will grow His fruit in you.

Going Deeper

Given and Grown covers every gift and every fruit of the Spirit word by word. My mini book Knowing the Holy Spirit is a short start.

Study Questions

1. Why does it matter that the Holy Spirit is a Person and not a force?
2. Which work of the Spirit in the list above encourages you most?
3. Read Galatians 5:16 and 5:22-23. What does it look like to walk by the Spirit?

Part Three: People, Sin and Salvation

Chapter 9: Made for God

> *I will give thanks to You, because **in awesome ways I am distinguished; wonderful are Your works**, and my soul knows **it** exceedingly.*
>
> Psalm 139:14 (SLB)

Christians believe every person was made by God and for God. We are not just smart animals. We are creatures made in the image of God, with souls that will live forever. That gives every human being dignity and worth, and it gives every life a purpose.

What We Were Made For

Why did God make us? Not because He was lonely or needed anything. He made us out of His goodness, to know Him, enjoy Him, and show His glory. Jesus summed up what God wants from us in two commands.

> *And Jesus said to him, "'You shall love **the** Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is **the** first and great commandment. And **the** second **is** like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"* (Matthew 22:37-39)

We were made to love God with everything we are, and to love the people around us. When we do, we are living the way we were designed to live. When we don't, something is deeply wrong.

Body and Soul

God made us as whole persons, body and soul together. The body is not a prison for the soul. It is good, God's design. That's why Jesus rose in a body, and why we will too. When a believer dies, the soul goes to be with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8), and at the resurrection, body and soul will be joined again, forever.

Man and Woman

God made us male and female, equal in worth and both in His image, and designed marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24). Sex is God's good gift for marriage. Children are a gift from the Lord (Psalm 127:3). These aren't arbitrary rules. They are the Maker's instructions for how His creatures flourish.

Why It Matters

If you are made in God's image, your worth doesn't come from your looks, your bank account, your job, or what people think of you. It comes from God. And the same is true of every person you meet: the unborn child, the elderly man with dementia, the homeless woman on the corner, the person who disagrees with you. Each one bears God's image. That changes how we treat people.

Going Deeper

My Genesis Bible Study looks closely at creation and the image of God. My mini books Building a Marriage That Lasts and Living My Faith at Home look at God's design for marriage and family.

Study Questions

1. Read Matthew 22:37-39. What were we made for, according to Jesus?
2. How does being made in God's image change how you see yourself?
3. How should it change the way you treat others?

Chapter 10: What Went Wrong

> *for all sinned and fall short of the glory of God*
>
> Romans 3:23 (SLB)

If people are made in God's image, why is the world such a mess? Why do we lie, hate, cheat, kill, and hurt the people we love? The Bible's answer is one word: sin.

The Fall

God placed Adam and Eve in a perfect garden and gave them one command. They chose to disobey.

> *And the woman saw that the tree **was** good for food, and that it **was** a delight to the eyes, and the tree **was** desirable to make **one** wise; and she took from its fruit and ate, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.* (Genesis 3:6)

That first sin wasn't a small thing. It was rebellion, choosing their own way over God's. And it broke everything. Their relationship with God was broken; they hid from Him. Their relationship with each other was broken; they blamed each other. Their relationship with creation was broken; the ground was cursed. And death came into the world.

> *Because of this, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death passed to all men, because all sinned* (Romans 5:12)

What Sin Is

Sin is anything we think, say, do, or fail to do that goes against God's will. It's breaking His law (1 John 3:4). It's falling short of His glory. It isn't only the big crimes. Pride, lust, envy, lying, gossip, bitterness, and ignoring God are all sin.

And sin isn't just something we do. It's something we are. Since the fall, every person is born with a heart that's bent away from God. "The heart is deceitful more than everything" (Jeremiah 17:9). Children don't have to be taught to be selfish. It comes naturally. That's why the Bible says we are dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), not just sick, but spiritually dead, unable to save ourselves.

What Sin Does

Sin separates us from God. Isaiah said, "your iniquities have been separating between you and your God" (Isaiah 59:2). And sin brings judgment. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Not only physical death, but eternal separation from God.

This is bad news, and it has to be heard before the good news makes sense. A doctor has to tell you you're sick before you'll take the cure. The Bible is honest about us. But it never leaves us there.

> *For the wages of sin **is** death, but the gift of God **is** eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
> (Romans 6:23)

Going Deeper

The Road Home lays out what sin has done and what God has done about it. My mini book Starting Out with Christ is a short start.

Study Questions

1. Read Genesis 3:6 and Romans 5:12. How did sin enter the world, and what did it bring?
2. Why does the Bible say we are dead in sin, not just weak or sick?
3. Why do we need to hear the bad news before the good news?

Chapter 11: Saved by Grace Through Faith

> *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this **is** not from yourselves; the gift **is** of God, not from works, so that no one may boast.*
>
> Ephesians 2:8-9 (SLB)

Here is the good news, the gospel. God, in His love, sent His Son to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. Jesus lived the perfect life we haven't lived, died the death we deserve, and rose again. And God offers salvation as a free gift to everyone who turns from sin and trusts in Jesus.

> *For God so loved the world, that He gave His Son, the only begotten, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world that He might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. The one who believes in Him is not judged; but the one who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* (John 3:16-18)

Grace

Grace is God's undeserved favor. We don't earn salvation. We can't. If we could, Jesus wouldn't have needed to die. Every other religion in the world says, in one way or another, "do this and you will be accepted." The gospel says, "Jesus has done it; receive it."

> *not by works which we did in righteousness, but according to His mercy He saved us, through **the** washing of regeneration and renewal of **the** Holy Spirit* (Titus 3:5)

Faith

Faith is how we receive the gift. It means trusting Jesus, relying on Him alone to save you, the way you'd trust a bridge by walking out on it. It's not just knowing facts about Jesus. It's putting your whole weight on Him.

Faith goes together with repentance. To repent means to turn, to change your mind about sin and about God, and to turn from your sin to Him. They are two sides of one coin. You can't turn to Jesus without turning from sin, and you can't truly turn from sin without turning to Jesus.

> *that if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of **the** dead, you will be saved* (Romans 10:9)

What God Does When We Believe

- **Justifies us.** God declares us righteous, not because we are, but because Christ's righteousness is counted to us (Galatians 2:16). We are completely forgiven.
- **Gives us new birth.** The Spirit makes us new people with new hearts (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- **Adopts us.** We become God's children, with all the rights of sons and daughters (Galatians 4:4-7).
- **Begins to make us holy.** This lifelong growth is called sanctification.

Only Through Jesus

Christians believe Jesus is the only way of salvation. That sounds narrow, but it's what Jesus Himself said: "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Peter said there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). If there were other ways, the cross would have been unnecessary. God provided one way, at great cost, and He opens it to everyone.

Going Deeper

The Road Home walks through God's plan of salvation step by step, with a prayer for anyone ready to trust Christ. My mini book New Life in Christ is a short start.

Study Questions

1. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. Why can't we earn salvation?
2. What is the difference between knowing about Jesus and trusting Him?
3. How are faith and repentance connected?
4. Have you put your trust in Jesus? If not, what is holding you back?

Chapter 12: Assurance and the New Life

> *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life, and so that you may believe in the name of the Son of God.*
>
> 1 John 5:13 (SLB)

Can a Christian know for sure that he or she is saved? The Bible says yes. John wrote his first letter "so that you may know that you have eternal life." Not hope. Not guess. Know.

For years I was a functioning alcoholic who looked successful on the outside. On May 29, 2020, my wife caught me and took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day. Change did not come from my strength. It came from God giving me a new life and a clear mind. Recovery also showed me the need for a Christ-centered approach, which is why I wrote New Beginnings.

Where Assurance Comes From

Assurance rests first on God's promises. Jesus said, "the one who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). If you have trusted Christ, God's word says you have eternal life. Your feelings will go up and down. His promise doesn't.

Assurance is also strengthened by the Spirit's witness in your heart that you are God's child (Romans 8:16), and by the changes He makes in your life. John's letter gives tests: Do you keep His commands? Do you love other believers? Do you believe Jesus is the Christ? These aren't hoops to jump through to be saved. They are signs that you have been.

Kept by God

Jesus said of His sheep, "I give them eternal life, and they will certainly never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28). Paul said nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39), and that He who began a good work in you will complete it (Philippians 1:6). Our security rests on God's grip on us, not our grip on Him.

I should say that faithful Christians differ on one question here: whether a person who has truly been saved can later fall away and be lost. Both sides agree that a person who keeps on rejecting Christ shows they don't know Him, and that a true believer can rest in God's promises. I believe the passages above teach that God keeps those who are truly His.

The New Life

Salvation is not the end. It's the beginning. A person who has been saved will grow. Not perfectly, and not all at once, but really. The old habits begin to lose their grip. New desires grow: to read God's Word, to pray, to be with His people, to obey Him, to tell others about Him.

We are not saved by good works, but we are saved for good works. Right after Paul says we are saved by grace through faith, he adds this.

> *For we are His workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.* (Ephesians 2:10)

Christians still sin, and when we do, we confess it and God forgives (1 John 1:9). But a Christian can't be comfortable in sin anymore. The Spirit won't let them.

Going Deeper

My mini book Knowing Where I Stand with God covers assurance. The Road Home includes a chapter on both views of eternal security.

Study Questions

1. Read 1 John 5:13. What does God want believers to know?
2. Where does real assurance come from?
3. What changes has God made in your life since you came to Christ?

Part Four: The Church and the Christian Life

Chapter 13: The Church

> *And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and **the** gates of Hades will not prevail against it.*
>
> Matthew 16:18 (SLB)

Christians believe the church is the people of God, everyone who belongs to Jesus Christ. It's not a building. It's not a denomination. It's a body, with Christ as the head and every believer as a member.

> *Now you are **the** body of Christ, and members individually.* (1 Corinthians 12:27)

One Church, Many Congregations

The Bible talks about the church in two ways. There is the universal church, all true believers in every place and every age, from the apostles to today, the body Jesus is building. And there is the local church, a congregation of believers who meet together in one place, worship together, serve one another, and are led by pastors and elders.

Every Christian is part of the universal church the moment they believe. The Spirit baptizes us into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13). And every Christian is meant to belong to a local church. The New Testament knows nothing of a believer who goes it alone.

> *and let us consider one another for stirring up of love and of good works, not forsaking the assembling together of ourselves, as **is the** custom of some, but encouraging **one another**, and so much the more as you see the day drawing near.* (Hebrews 10:24-25)

What the Church Does

From its first days, the church gathered for four things.

> *So then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and **there** were added on that day about three thousand souls. And they were steadfastly continuing in the teaching of the apostles and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers.* (Acts 2:41-42)

The apostles' teaching, which we have in the New Testament. Fellowship, sharing life together. The breaking of bread, which includes the Lord's Supper. And prayer. Add to that worship, and going out to make disciples of all nations, and you have the church's job description.

The Church Is Not Perfect

Every church is made of forgiven sinners, and you will be let down by it sometimes. But Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25). If He loves her, so should we. Find a church that teaches the Bible faithfully, believes the gospel, honors Christ, and loves people. Then commit. Show up, serve, give, pray, and be patient with others the way God is patient with you.

Going Deeper

My mini book Growing Together as the Church looks at church life. The Lord's Table covers the Lord's Supper.

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between the universal church and a local church?
2. Read Acts 2:41-42. What four things did the first church give itself to?
3. Why can't a Christian follow Jesus well alone?

Chapter 14: Baptism and the Lord's Supper

> *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 11:26 (SLB)

Jesus gave His church two simple practices to keep until He returns: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Many Christians call them ordinances, because the Lord ordained them. Others call them sacraments. Both are pictures of the gospel that we act out with water, bread and the cup.

Baptism

Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). In the New Testament, people believed and then were baptized (Acts 2:41; 8:36-38).

Baptism is a picture of what happens when we trust Christ. Going under the water pictures dying and being buried with Him. Coming up pictures rising to new life.

> *Or are you unaware that as many **of us** as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised out of **the** dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.* (Romans 6:3-4)

Baptism doesn't save us. Faith in Christ does. The thief on the cross was never baptized, and Jesus promised him paradise (Luke 23:43). But baptism isn't optional either. It's the first step of obedience for a new believer, a public way of saying, "I belong to Jesus now." Some churches baptize infants, and some sprinkle or pour instead of immersing. Those are real differences among believers. I believe the New Testament pattern is to baptize believers after they come to faith.

The Lord's Supper

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus took bread and a cup and gave them to His disciples.

> *For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was being betrayed, took bread; and having given thanks, He broke **it** and said, "Take, eat; this is My body, which is being broken for you; do this in My remembrance." Likewise also **He took** the cup after having supped, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink **it**, in My remembrance." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.* (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

The Lord's Supper, also called communion, does three things. It looks back: we remember His body given and His blood shed for us. It looks around: we share it together as one family, in real fellowship with Christ and His people (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). And it looks ahead: we "proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes."

Paul warns us not to take it in an unworthy manner. That doesn't mean only perfect people can take it. It means we should come seriously, examining our hearts, confessing sin, and making things right with others (1 Corinthians 11:27-32). Churches differ on what happens in the bread and the cup and how often to take it. I believe it is a remembrance and proclamation, with real fellowship with the living Christ.

Going Deeper

The Lord's Table is a complete guide to communion, including how different churches understand it. My mini book Understanding Baptism covers baptism.

Study Questions

1. What does baptism picture, according to Romans 6:3-4?
2. Why is baptism important even though it doesn't save us?
3. What three directions does the Lord's Supper point us?

Chapter 15: Growing in Christ

> *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord.*
>
> Colossians 3:16 (SLB)

Christians believe that once a person is saved, God begins the lifelong work of making them more like Jesus. We grow, not by trying harder in our own strength, but by staying close to Christ through the means He has given. Here are the main ones.

Reading and translating the Bible has been the strongest part of my walk with God. Where I have struggled is letting pride and self-reliance keep me from honest fellowship and asking for help. Growth happens when we stay in Scripture and let other believers walk with us.

The Word

God's Word is our food. Jesus said man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). Read it every day, even a little. Study it with others. Memorize it. Obey it. A Christian who neglects the Bible will be weak and confused. One who feeds on it will grow strong.

Prayer

Prayer is talking with God. It's how we praise Him, thank Him, confess our sins, and ask for what we and others need. Paul says, "Pray unceasingly" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). That doesn't mean always on your knees. It means living in constant conversation with your Father.

Worship and Fellowship

We grow together, not alone. Gathering each week with God's people to sing, pray, hear the Word, and take the Lord's Supper is part of God's plan for our growth. So is sharing our lives with other believers who can encourage us and hold us accountable.

Obedience and Service

Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Obedience isn't how we earn God's love. It's how we show it. And every believer has gifts to use in serving others. We grow by doing what He says.

Giving and Witness

Christians give generously and cheerfully to God's work and to people in need (2 Corinthians 9:7). And we tell others about Jesus. Every believer is a witness. You don't need a seminary degree. You just tell people

what Jesus has done for you, the way a blind man once said, “One thing I know, that being blind, now I see” (John 9:25).

Suffering

God also uses hard times to grow us. Trials test and strengthen our faith (James 1:2-4). He promises to work all things together for good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28). That doesn’t make pain easy. It does make it meaningful.

Going Deeper

My mini books Praying Every Day, Making Room for Prayer, Trusting the Word of God, Serving Others and Sharing Christ, and Holding On When Life Is Hard each take one of these up.

Study Questions

1. Which of these means of growth is strongest in your life? Which is weakest?
2. Why is obedience the fruit of salvation and not the root of it?
3. Pick one area to grow in this month. What is your first step?

Part Five: The Things to Come

Chapter 16: Jesus Is Coming Again

> *who also said, "Galilean men, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner as you watched Him going into heaven."*
>
> Acts 1:11 (SLB)

Christians believe Jesus Christ will return personally, bodily and visibly to this earth. The same Jesus who ascended will come back. This is called the second coming, and it is the blessed hope of every believer (Titus 2:13).

What I Believe the Bible Teaches About the Order of Events

Christians agree that Jesus is coming back. They don't all agree on the order of events around His return. I'll tell you plainly what I believe the Bible teaches, and I want you to know that other faithful believers see it differently.

The rapture. I believe Jesus will first come for His church, and believers, both the dead and the living, will be caught up to meet Him in the air.

> *because the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with **the** voice of an archangel and with **the** trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are living, who remain, will be caught away together with them in **the** clouds to meet the Lord in **the** air; and so we will always be with **the** Lord.* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

This could happen at any moment. No sign has to come first. Paul says God did not appoint us for wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9), and I believe that is why the church is taken out before the time of wrath that follows.

The tribulation. After the rapture comes a seven-year period of judgment on the earth, the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:27). A world ruler, the Antichrist, will rise, make a covenant, break it, and demand to be worshiped. God will pour out judgments, described in Revelation 6 to 19. Many will come to faith even then.

Christ's return in glory. At the end of the tribulation, Jesus will return with His saints, defeat His enemies, and set up His kingdom (Revelation 19:11-16).

The thousand-year reign. Jesus will reign on the earth for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6), and God will keep His promises to Israel.

The final judgment and the new creation. Then comes the great white throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15), and God will make a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21).

How Should We Live?

Jesus told us to be ready, because we don't know the day or the hour (Matthew 24:42-44). That doesn't mean quitting our jobs and staring at the sky. It means living faithfully, telling others about Christ, and keeping short accounts with God. Peter says the Lord is patient, "not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). The delay is mercy. Use it.

Going Deeper

My Revelation Bible Study: A Verse by Verse Study walks through the whole book. Daniel and Revelation Side by Side shows how they fit together. My mini book Living in Hope of the Return of Christ is a short start.

Study Questions

1. Read Acts 1:11. What did the angels promise about Jesus' return?
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. What will happen to believers who have died?
3. How should knowing Jesus could come at any moment change the way you live this week?

Chapter 17: Heaven and Hell

> *In the house of My Father are many dwelling places; but if not, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am, you also may be.*
>
> John 14:2-3 (SLB)

Christians believe every person will live forever, either with God or apart from Him. The Bible is clear about both destinies, and Jesus spoke about them more than anyone.

After 36 years of marriage, two daughters and granddaughters, I have seen plenty of joy in this life, along with real sorrow and regret. Revelation 21:3-4 promises that God will wipe away every tear. Knowing how the story ends gives us strength to keep going now.

Judgment

Every person will stand before God. “Each of us will give an account concerning himself to God” (Romans 14:12). Those who have rejected Christ will be judged by their works, and no one’s works are good enough (Revelation 20:11-15). Those who belong to Christ will not be condemned, because He was condemned in their place (Romans 8:1). Believers will still give an account of how we lived and be rewarded for faithfulness (2 Corinthians 5:10), but not to decide whether we are saved.

Hell

Hell is real, and it is forever. Jesus said, “these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46). It is described as fire, darkness, and separation from the presence of the Lord. It isn’t a place where God is unfair. It’s where people receive what they chose: life without God.

I don’t enjoy writing that paragraph. But it would be unloving to leave it out. Jesus warned about hell because He didn’t want anyone to go there. That’s why He went to the cross.

Heaven

When a believer dies, he goes immediately to be with the Lord, which Paul says is “very much better” (Philippians 1:23). And at the end, God will make all things new.

> *And I heard a loud voice out of heaven, saying, “Look, the tabernacle of God **is** with men, and He will tabernacle with them, and they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them, their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will not be any longer, nor mourning nor crying nor pain will be any longer, because the first things passed away.”*
> (Revelation 21:3-4)

Heaven isn’t floating on clouds playing harps. It is a real, renewed creation, with resurrection bodies, where we will see God face to face, worship Him, serve Him, and enjoy Him and each other forever, with

no more sin, sickness, death or tears. The best thing about heaven is not the streets of gold. It's that God is there.

Why It Matters

Eternity puts everything else in perspective. The things we worry about most will soon be forgotten. The things we do for Christ will last. And the people around us will live forever somewhere. That should make us urgent about sharing the gospel, and full of hope when we bury a believing friend.

Going Deeper

My mini book Facing Death with Hope speaks to grief and death.

Study Questions

1. Read Matthew 25:46. How does Jesus describe the two destinies?
2. Why is it loving to warn people about hell?
3. Read Revelation 21:3-4. What are you most looking forward to?

Chapter 18: Living What We Believe

> *He has told you, O man, what **is** good; and what does the LORD require from you but to do justice, and to love steadfast love, and to walk humbly with your God?*
>
> Micah 6:8 (SLB)

Belief is not just something you hold in your head. What you truly believe shows up in how you live. James says faith without works is dead (James 2:26). So let's end where it really counts.

Belief Shapes Life

If God is real, then we worship Him and not money, comfort, or ourselves. If the Bible is His Word, we read it and obey it. If Jesus is Lord, He gets the final say in our decisions. If we are saved by grace, we can't look down on anyone, and we can extend grace to people who don't deserve it. If every person bears God's image, we treat every person with respect. If Jesus is coming again, we live ready. If heaven and hell are real, we tell others about Jesus.

Every doctrine in this book has a "so what" attached to it. Theology that doesn't change how you live hasn't been understood yet.

Love Marks Us

Jesus said the world would know we are His disciples by one thing.

> *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love among one another.* (John 13:35)

Not by our knowledge, our arguments, or our church attendance, but by our love. Truth and love belong together. Truth without love becomes harsh. Love without truth becomes empty. Jesus was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), and that is our goal too.

Hold Firm, Stay Humble

Hold firm to the core truths in this book. They are worth living for, and many have died for them. On the secondary questions where faithful Christians differ, hold your view humbly and love those who see it differently. An old saying puts it this way: in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.

Going Deeper

My Bible studies walk through nearly every book of the Bible, verse by verse. The Whole Story ties the whole Bible together in one narrative. And the next time someone asks you what Christians believe, you can tell them.

Study Questions

1. Pick one belief from this book. How should it change the way you live?
2. Read John 13:35. Why is love the mark of a disciple?
3. What is the difference between essential and non-essential beliefs? Give an example of each.

A Closing Word

You have just walked through the core truths of the Christian faith. There is one God, who made us and has spoken in His Word. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ, God the Son, became man, died for our sins and rose again. We are sinners saved by grace through faith in Him alone. The Spirit lives in every believer and makes us new. The church is His body. Jesus is coming again, and we will live with Him forever.

That is the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). It has been believed by Christians for two thousand years, in every language and culture. It is worth knowing, worth living, and worth sharing.

If you have never put your trust in Jesus, I hope you will do it today. Tell Him you know you are a sinner, that you believe He died for you and rose again, and that you are trusting Him alone to save you. Then find a Bible-teaching church and tell someone what you have done.

Appendix A: The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed is one of the oldest summaries of the Christian faith. The apostles didn't write it, but it grew out of the questions asked of new believers at baptism in the early centuries, and it reached its present form by about the 700s. Here it is in its traditional English wording from the Book of Common Prayer.

> I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell; The third day he rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; The holy Catholick Church; The Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen.

Two lines need a short explanation. "Catholick Church" means the universal church, all true believers everywhere, not one denomination. "He descended into hell" has been understood different ways. Many take it to mean Jesus truly died and went to the place of the dead, as Acts 2:27-31 says. "The quick and the dead" means the living and the dead.

Appendix B: Where to Go Deeper

Chapter	Read next
1. There Is a God	Is There Really a God (mini book); Dug Up and Written Down
2. The Bible Is God's Word	Which Bible, Which Books?; Dug Up and Written Down; Foretold; Trusting the Word of God
3. One God in Three Persons	One God, Three Persons
4. God the Creator	Genesis Bible Study; The Whole Story
5. Jesus Is God and Man	Who Jesus Really Is; John Bible Study; Foretold
6. The Cross	The Cross and the Empty Tomb; The Road Home; The Lord's Table
7. He Is Risen	Dug Up and Written Down; The Cross and the Empty Tomb
8. The Holy Spirit	Given and Grown; Knowing the Holy Spirit
9. Made for God	Genesis Bible Study; Building a Marriage That Lasts; Living My Faith at Home
10. What Went Wrong	The Road Home; Starting Out with Christ
11. Saved by Grace Through Faith	The Road Home; New Life in Christ
12. Assurance and the New Life	Knowing Where I Stand with God; The Road Home
13. The Church	Growing Together as the Church
14. Baptism and the Lord's Supper	Understanding Baptism; The Lord's Table
15. Growing in Christ	Praying Every Day; Making Room for Prayer; Trusting the Word of God; Serving Others and Sharing Christ; Holding On When Life Is Hard
16. Jesus Is Coming Again	Revelation Bible Study; Daniel and Revelation Side by Side; Living in Hope of the Return of Christ
17. Heaven and Hell	Facing Death with Hope
18. Living What We Believe	The Whole Story; my Bible studies

Appendix C: Scripture Index

This index lists the Bible passages quoted or cited in this book. The numbers after each passage are chapter numbers. “Intro” is Before You Begin, and “Back” is the closing pages.

- **Genesis:** 1:1 (4); 1:2 (4); 1:27 (4); 2:24 (9); 3:6 (10)
- **Deuteronomy:** 6:4 (3)
- **Psalm:** 19:1 (1); 90:2 (1); 127:3 (9); 139:14 (4, 9)
- **Isaiah:** 6:3 (1); 46:9-10 (1); 53:5 (6); 53:5-6 (6); 59:2 (10)
- **Jeremiah:** 17:9 (10)
- **Daniel:** 9:27 (16)
- **Micah:** 6:8 (18)
- **Matthew:** 3:16-17 (3); 4:4 (15); 16:18 (13); 22:37-39 (9); 24:35 (2); 24:42-44 (16); 25:46 (17); 28:11-15 (7); 28:19 (3, 14)
- **Mark:** 2:5-7 (5); 10:45 (6)
- **Luke:** 23:43 (14)
- **John:** 1:1 (3); 1:1-3 (5); 1:3 (4); 1:14 (5, 18); 1:29 (6); 3:5-8 (8); 3:16-18 (11); 5:24 (12); 8:58 (5); 9:25 (15); 10:28 (12); 10:35 (2); 11:25 (7); 13:35 (18); 14:2-3 (17); 14:6 (11); 14:15 (15); 14:16 (3); 14:16-17 (8); 16:8 (8); 17:17 (Intro); 19:30 (6); 20:28 (5)
- **Acts:** 1:8 (8); 1:9-11 (7); 1:11 (16); 2:27-31 (Back); 2:41 (14); 2:41-42 (13); 4:12 (11); 5:3-4 (3); 8:36-38 (14)
- **Romans:** 1:4 (7); 1:20 (1); 3:23 (10); 3:25-26 (6); 5:8 (6); 5:12 (10); 6:3-4 (14); 6:23 (10); 8:1 (17); 8:9 (8); 8:16 (12); 8:28 (15); 8:34 (7); 8:38-39 (12); 10:9 (11); 14:12 (17)
- **1 Corinthians:** 10:16-17 (14); 11:23-26 (14); 11:26 (14); 11:27-32 (14); 12:7 (8); 12:13 (13); 12:27 (13); 15:3-4 (7); 15:3-8 (7); 15:17 (7); 15:20-23 (7)
- **2 Corinthians:** 5:8 (9); 5:10 (17); 5:17 (11); 5:18-21 (6); 9:7 (15); 13:14 (3)
- **Galatians:** 2:16 (11); 4:4-7 (11); 5:16 (8); 5:22-23 (8)
- **Ephesians:** 1:13-14 (8); 2:1 (10); 2:8-9 (11); 2:10 (12); 4:30 (8); 5:25 (13)
- **Philippians:** 1:6 (12); 1:23 (17); 2:5-8 (5); 2:7 (5)
- **Colossians:** 1:16-17 (4); 2:9 (3); 2:15 (6); 3:16 (15)
- **1 Thessalonians:** 4:16-17 (16); 5:9 (16); 5:17 (15)
- **1 Timothy:** 2:5 (5)
- **2 Timothy:** 3:16-17 (2)
- **Titus:** 2:13 (5, 16); 3:5 (11)
- **Hebrews:** 1:1-2 (1); 4:15 (5); 10:24-25 (13); 11:6 (1)
- **James:** 1:2-4 (15); 2:26 (18)
- **1 Peter:** 3:18 (6)
- **2 Peter:** 1:20-21 (2); 3:9 (16)
- **1 John:** 1:9 (12); 3:4 (10); 4:8 (1); 5:13 (12)
- **Revelation:** 19:11-16 (16); 20:4-6 (16); 20:11-15 (16, 17); 21:3-4 (17)

About This Book

What do Christians actually believe, and why? What Christians Believe answers in plain words, with the Bible open. It walks through the core truths of the faith one at a time: who God is, why the Bible can be trusted, the Trinity, who Jesus is and what He did on the cross, His resurrection, the Holy Spirit, sin and salvation, assurance, the church, baptism and the Lord's Supper, growing in Christ, the return of Jesus, and heaven and hell.

Every chapter is short and built on Scripture. Each one ends with study questions and a Going Deeper note that points to a fuller book on that subject. Where faithful Christians differ, the book says so plainly.

It is a starting place for new believers, a refresher for longtime Christians, a teaching tool for parents and small groups, and a clear answer for anyone who is curious. The Apostles' Creed is printed at the back.